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25 YEAR RE-REVIEW

Browne Tells of Days as Prisoner of Castro

Former Milwaukeean Says Cubans Took His Skin Divers for CIA Agents

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"I'm going back to the islands."

Jack Browne, the skin diver and former Milwaukeean who was released Tuesday in Cuba with eight other shipwrecked American divers, hastened to add that he did not mean Cuba, however, but the Bahamas.

Browne was interviewed by telephone on his return by plane to Miami, Fla., after nearly two months imprisonment in Cuba. He had tried to avoid reporters in Miami because of his physical condition.

"I lost 30 to 35 pounds," Browne said. "They didn't deliberately try to starve us. They fed us by Cuban standards—rice and beans. But it certainly wasn't American style cooking."

Tells of Guns

Asked if he was threatened with death, Browne said laconically:

"Sure — all the time. Every time they talked to us there were guns pointing at us. They kept trying to make CIA agents out of us."

Browne paused and added sarcastically:

"That's their first love—the CIA." (The CIA is the United States central intelligence agency.)

"The Cubans figured right away that we were CIA agents," Browne said. "Anyone arriving in Cuba goes to G-2 (intelligence). We were taken to the G-2 headquarters in Havana in cars."

"They tried to convert my boys to communism. Actually, they worked on the younger fellows more than on me. We were kept in individual cells. There were no windows, just louvered doors."

Treatment Improves

Browne said that in the last three weeks the group lived in one cell and was given better treatment. He credited the improvement to efforts on their behalf by James B. Donovan,

the New York lawyer who negotiated with Prime Minister Castro for their release.

The nine Americans, headed by Browne, sailed from Florida in January on what they variously described as a fishing, lobstering, skin diving and treasure hunting expedition after his 45th birthday. He was that was to carry them as far greeted by his wife, Betsy Ann, as the Dominican Republic.

Their converted buoy tender, the 115 foot Shrub, lost its rudder off the Bahamas and later sank. Browne, his partner Robert C. Moran of Lockport, N. Y., and their seven crewmen jumped into a 26 foot inflatable boat and drifted four days until they washed ashore near Camaguey, 300 miles southeast of Havana.

Suspicious Looking

"We were lucky we weren't shot to death as we walked up that beach," Browne said. "We certainly were a suspicious looking bunch. Some of our men had been diving, trying to fix the ship's rudder, the day she went down. They were still in their rubber diving suits when we reached Cuba."

"We had no choice but to drift toward Cuba because of the wind's direction. We improvised a sail from a piece of plywood."

Browne recalled that he had been a prisoner of the Castro government in 1960. "When he was held for six weeks after

hurricane Donna. Of that incident, he said: "I was in Cuba trying to get repairs for an SS boat. One day the (United States) government put an embargo on Cuba. They seized the boat and all my gear."

In the telephone interview, he talked in the offhand manner of a veteran adventurer.

"I figured Donovan was near this morning. A guard offered me coffee at 4 o'clock and I figured something was up."

Will Return to Islands

Browne reiterated: "We're going back to the islands where we got squared away."

Earlier, Browne had let his partner, Moran, talk to newspapermen. Browne seemed more naked than the others, the Associated Press and United Press International reported. He blinked often.

Browne was dressed in a velvet sports shirt and griny trousers.

Browne came back on the day after his 45th birthday. He was greeted by his wife, Betsy Ann.

By the time Browne and his wife had moved into a hotel, he seemed to have regained strength and composure.

On the telephone, he strayed from his story to ask about Milwaukee.

"I haven't been there for about five years," he said. "My mother and two brothers live there, you know."

They are Mrs. George Browne, 2350 N. Lake dr.; Barney Oldfield Browne, 2313 W. Dunwoody rd.; Glendale, and William M., who lives with his mother.

Started Diving Here

Browne inquired about several persons in Milwaukee whom he knew. He started his diving activities here when he was only a boy.

Browne's wife's reaction to his return was: "This time I'm going to chain him to the bedpost."

At the press conference,

Browne sat quietly with his arm around his wife while Moran talked.

Moran told the story: "The nine men drifted in the inflatable boat for five days."

"Sharks Chased Us" — "He was lucky but every time we tried to make repairs the sharks came around and chased us out of the water."

On the evening of the fifth day, the boat drifted ashore at a lighthouse near Mantas, Cuba. There the men were met by two Cuban coastal patrolmen armed with rifles.

They were taken to the lighthouse, and were in solitary confinement for five days. However, Castro's secret police came for them and took them to Havana, where they spent the next 43 days in solitary confinement.

In that period each man was interrogated every day and each was a suspect of being a spy for the United States.